

Dear Mr. McGowan,

CC: Minnehaha County Public Defender's Office

This letter is so hard for me to write. I can't even begin to explain how I feel about what happened on November 20, 2016. I try to be strong and not cry in front of people, especially my four young children, but I don't know if I can be strong forever. I understand that death penalty cases have long trials and years of appeals. I feel that if my brother was executed at the end of this nightmare, it would be the straw that broke the camel's back. I think it is important for you to understand that you may feel you're punishing my brother, but you'd be torturing me, my sister, my husband and my young family if you choose to seek the death penalty in Heath's case.

Our mother, Carol, was loving and caring. You could steal \$100 from her and the next day she'd give you the shirt off her back. Forgiveness was her defining characteristic. She always saw the best in people. She volunteered for the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program working for children, and this wasn't the only thing she did to help others. She was a single mom who worked so hard, first at Hardee's and then she got her nursing degree, all to help us kids when we were little. She always made sure we had what we needed, no matter how hard she had to work. She always wanted the best for us. We think of our mom every day. We think of her every time we do laundry on a Sunday. She would do loads and loads to help us out. She'd still cut my French toast for me if I asked her to. She was just that kind of mom.

Brayden was a care free little boy. He loved life. It didn't matter what was going on in his life, he always had a smile on his face. He just loved playing with his toys, video games, playing with balls, and riding his power wheels. Above all, he loved his uncle "Heathy" who watched him a lot. It seemed that they had a special connection. Heath loved Brayden. Our mom and Brayden were probably the two most important people in his life.

Of course, this makes everything so much harder to understand and process but we've known for a long time that Heath is very mentally ill. Our brother needs a hospital not to be executed. We feel the system let us down when we tried to get help for Heath and now it feels like it may fail us again. We believe you have the power to stop this pain for us and we ask that you please do not seek the death penalty against our brother and put our family through even more. To us it just doesn't seem right that we should suffer even more considering all that we

have experienced. As a well-educated man who seeks justice for his job, how is it right to execute a man with a severe enough mental illness to kill the most loved members of his family?

If you knew Heath, you'd know this wasn't him. Especially as he loved his nephews and nieces so much and always put their needs over his own. I remember once when my girls needed dance shoes and Heath offered to buy them even though he didn't have much money. He always would show up at the house with sour patch kids candies for the kids. He loved our kids.

Our children are currently 9, 8, 3 and 1. Ashtyn is our oldest, then Ella. Ella recently wrote the letter that is attached to her uncle Heathy. She was particularly close to her uncle. We've had to get counseling for both Ashtyn and Ella through their school. Ashtyn struggled to even go and hasn't talked too much about it. Ella asks a lot of questions and we can't even answer them. We couldn't watch the Macy's Day Parade last year because it was too painful as we worry about the kids seeing things on TV about Heath's case. We know we can't shelter our kids forever, but we certainly don't want them growing up with Uncle Heath on death row.

Please know that killing another member of our family in no way honors my mom's life and doesn't reflect anything my mom stood for. Even Cassandra, who has lost her mom, her only child, and basically her brother, has found it in her to forgive. That's the kind of person our mom raised us to be. Heath's execution would not bring us closure. It would feel like we'd been cut in half, now my sister and I would be left just the two of us when it has always been the three of us. You should know that we went through a lot as kids. Our childhood was tough. But we believe that for us November 20, 2016 should be the day we remember the beautiful person our mother was and the life-loving child that Brayden was, and not the day that was first on the path to our brother's execution.

We intend to fight for my brother's life until the end if we must. We will never, ever want our brother to get sentenced to death or executed. While it would be unbelievably hard for us, we would find the strength that our mother showed us, and the fight would be worth it for the sake of her memory.

We, the victims and the family members of Heath Otto, ask that you agree to not seek the death penalty in his case.

